

REMARKS

Applicant has carefully studied the Office Action dated November 12, 2003. The present response is intended to be fully responsive to all points of rejection and/or objection raised by the Examiner. Favorable reconsideration and allowance of the application is respectfully requested.

Status of Claims

Claims 1-18 are pending in the application. Claims 1, 2, 7, 8, 10, 11, 16 and 17 have been rejected. Claims 3 - 6, 9, 12 - 15, and 18 are objected to as depending from a rejected base claim.

Claims 1, 2, 7, 8, 10, 11, 16 and 17 have been canceled. Claims 3, 5, 9, 12, 14 and 18 have been amended.

35 U.S.C. § 102 Rejections

In the Office Action, the Examiner rejects claims 1, 2, 7, 8, 10, 11, 16 and 17 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e), as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,493,637 to Steeg. While applicant traverses the rejection, claims 1, 2, 7, 8, 10, 11, 16 and 17 have been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer. Applicant reserves the right to pursue cancelled claims in a continuation application.

Allowable Subject Matter

In the Office Action, the Examiner states that claims 3 - 6, 9, 12 - 15, and 18 are objected to but would be allowable if written in independent form. Claims 3, 5, 9, 12, 14 and 18 have been so amended. Claims 4, 6, 13 and 15 depend directly or indirectly from now-independent claims 3, 5, 9, 12, and 14, and are, *a fortiori*, deemed allowable.

Conclusion

Applicant respectfully submits that entry of the instant amendment renders the present application in condition for allowance, which action Applicant respectfully solicits.

Petition For Three-Month Extension Of Time Under 37 CFR 1.136(a)

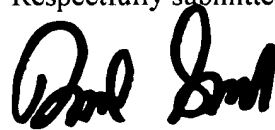
The period for responding to the instant Office Action was set to expire on February 12, 2004. Applicant hereby requests that the period for responding to the instant Office Action be extended by three (3) months, so as to expire on May 12, 2004. Accordingly, this response is being timely filed. The fee for a Petition for a Three-Month Extension of Time is Four Hundred and Seventy-Five Dollars (\$475.00) dollars for a small entity.

Authorization to charge Deposit Account

The United States Patent and Trademark Office is hereby authorized to charge Deposit Account 501380 in the amount of \$475.00 and any additional fee which is necessary in connection with the filing of this amendment and petition.

Favorable action on this amendment and petition is courteously solicited.

Respectfully submitted,



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